

LINCOLN - STORYTELLER

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Abraham Lincoln's Personality

Lincoln as a Storyteller

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
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Gems of Lincoln's Humor.

Personal Reminiscences of H. C. Whitney.

1501

MY ESTEEMED friend, General Lew Wallace, wrote me thus in 1891: "The first time I ever saw Mr. Lincoln was at the Danville (Ills.) circuit court. I sat up nearly all night listening to him, Ned Hannigan, John Pettit, Linder and Dan Mace telling stories. Lincoln beat them all. Altogether it was the best show I ever attended."

"Where did Lincoln get all his funny stories from?" was a conundrum often asked. He introduced me to Mr. Haeker of Union county and added, "This is the man who taught me all my funny stories." This gentleman was a pop-



STOLE SILENTLY AWAY.

ular politician who used frequently to go to the legislature from his county. Judge Treat of the United States court told me that Lincoln once borrowed a copy of "Jo Miller's Jokebook" and kept it for a month, and after that he used to relate jokes taken from that book, but with addenda and alterations, evidently made by Lincoln himself, to adapt them to the local situation.

To illustrate Douglas' claim of consistency in his advocacy of popular sovereignty he said: "That's like Johnny Gilles' wife, who used to attend a little store. She told a customer they lost money on everything they sold. 'How do you keep up?' queried the customer. "'Cause we sell so much,' was the reply."

Dr. Scroggs of Champaign had a suit in court, and the peculiarity of the name at once reminded Lincoln, as usual, of something. "That's like the advertisement, Smith & Huggs, classical school for boys and girls. Smith teaches the boys and Huggs the girls."

There came to the president during the war three conceited individuals with some sort of new device for human slaughter which they desired the government to adopt. He sent them to the war department, from whence they were referred to the navy department, and, being disheartened at the slow progress they were making, they returned to the White House and informed the president, ex cathedra,

that it was his duty to attend to it. "That," said Lincoln, "is like the Sunday school boy who had for his lesson the incident of the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace—Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego—but when he came to recite his lesson he couldn't for the life of him remember their names, so he was told to study hard and recite on the next Sunday. Well, he tried it the next Sabbath and got along well till he came to the stumbling block—the names—when he exclaimed with vexation, 'Tarnation, there come them three old bores again.'"

That ended their mission. They had no reply to this, and deeming it useless to prolong the struggle with a man of such infinite resources to meet emergencies, they folded their tents, like the Arabs, and stole silently away.



AN UNCONSCIONABLE BORE.

He illustrated Douglas' scheme of "squatter sovereignty" thus: "Pomp and Jim found a bear's cave in which the owner had secreted a quantity of honey for his winter's supply, and which they designed to rob, and while Jim entered the cave to steal the honey Pomp remained outside to watch for the return of the bear. Suddenly Jim exclaimed, 'What makes de hole dark?' Pomp, who was struggling with the returned bear, cried, 'Ef de tall hold slips you'll find out what makes de hole dark.' So with Douglas. If his tall hold of 'squatter sovereignty' fails him, the jig is up."

He cleverly got rid of one of those ardent but visionary patriots abounding during the war, who imagined they could either conduct matters differently or at least could make apt suggestions to the administration on the subject. This visionary schemer was introduced by a note from his neighbor, Secretary Smith, and, gaining an audience, commenced to develop his plan, when the president interrupted with,

dog," and he commenced a droll story, which the astonished auditor heard through and took it as an emphatic hint to retire, which he immediately did. Returning to his neighbor, the secretary, he indignantly asked, "What use was such a story at that time?" The secretary laughed loud and long and then explained, "You see, he wanted to get rid of you and get down to his work, and according to your own story he has done it effectually."

At the Danville court a lawyer was addressing a jury and, getting excited, waved his arms so vigorously as to cause his coat tails to fly up, revealing an unseemly rent in his pantaloons. The boys deemed it a sufficient basis for a joke, so a subscription paper was got up to buy a patch for —'s pants. It was circulated within the bar, and we each subscribed a cent till it reached Lincoln, who wrote, "Can't subscribe anything to the end in view."

In order to enforce a plain truth on the clergymen who came to him in September, 1862, to urge him to issue an emancipation proclamation, he quietly asked, "How many legs will a sheep have if you call his tail a leg?" The answer was naturally five. "You are mistaken," said Lincoln, "for calling the tail a leg doesn't make it so." And thus he refuted their position that to merely proclaim emancipation did, as they claimed, of necessity emancipate."

Again, in the same strain, he asked, "If there are three birds sitting on a fence and you fire and kill one of them, how many will there be left?" The obvious answer would be two. "No, there wouldn't," said this modern Pilpay, "for the other two would fly away." And the most ordinary experience attests that there could be no logical reply to this assertion.

Of an unconscionable bore, who had hemmed him up in a railroad car seat and bored him for an hour, he said, "That feller can crowd the most words into the fewest ideas of any one I ever knew."

In July, 1861, just after the battle of Bull Run, I was regaling him with the local news of our haunts in Illinois, and among other matters I informed him of the death of an old Whig friend who had turned "copperhead" and



TWO FAT CONSTITUENTS.

made himself so obnoxious as to endanger his life, and he died largely of fright caused by that circumstance.

February 6, 1907.

LINCOLN'S STORIES.

By some Abraham Lincoln was described as the saddest man they ever met; by others he was described as a constant storyteller. These apparent inconsistencies were due to the fact that throughout his life he seemed to carry upon his heart a great burden—a burden not so much for himself as for others—and that to lighten this burden he seemed to cultivate the art of story-telling. Many of the stories told of Lincoln, however, were not his own, but were attributed to him to give them currency. He was, perhaps, the most successful user of stories to make clear his point in speeches and other utterances. He was a plain man. His early life was spent among plain people and his stories were the stories of plain people. They were homely, but effective illustrations. His own explanation of his resort to illustration was made in a conversation with Colonel Van Buren, and is made public for the first time by Colonel Burt in the February number of the *Century*. To the request of an officer who accompanied Colonels Van Buren and Burt on their visit to the President that he tell one of his good stories, Mr. Lincoln drew himself up and, with great dignity said:

"I believe I have the popular reputation of being a storyteller, but I do not deserve the name in its general sense; for it is not the story itself, but its purpose, or effect, that interests me. I often avoid a long and useless discussion by others or a laborious explanation on my own part by a short story that illustrates my point of view. So, too, the sharpness of a refusal or the edge of a rebuke may be blunted by an appropriate story, so as to save wounded feeling and yet serve the purpose. No, I am not simply a storyteller, but story-telling as an emollient saves me much friction and distress."

In the light of this statement many of the stories told by Mr. Lincoln have a new significance. They also have their lesson for other public speakers and writers who would make clear to their hearers and readers the lesson they wish to teach or the point they wish to make.

1809—The Lincoln Centenary—1909

Lincoln as a Story Teller

Part Second—Cream of His
Anecdotes—Brigadiers Ver-
sus Horses—Hoosier and Gin-
gerbread—As Phrasemaker

By James A. Edgerton

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ONE time a Confederate vessel with foreign consuls on board steamed out of the port of Charleston and remained outside for twenty-four hours. The Charleston papers therefore claimed that according to international law the blockade was broken and could thereafter be disregarded. Lincoln looked into the law, concluded there was nothing in the claim and illustrated his view of the case thus:

It is very much "HE WOULDN'T BE AS IF A MAN HAD LOOSE, WOULD HE?" been hooped up tight in a hogshead and should contrive in some way to knock the bung out and then issue a proclamation through the bunghole that he was free. He wouldn't be loose, would he?

When Mr. Lincoln became prominent in Republican politics in Illinois one of his old Whig friends upbraided him for having gone in with "them abolitionists." This friend said he had come all the way to Springfield to find why he had done it. Mr. Lincoln evaded an argument and satisfied the old Whig by an inevitable and characteristic story:

You and I are like the boy and the tanner. A country boy ran off to the city. He walked all day and came to the outskirts of a small town. The first building he encountered was a tannery, and through the hole of the door protruded the tail of a cat which was used as a latchstring. The boy stopped to eye it with great curiosity, and just then the tanner came out of another door. "What is it, boy? What do you want?" he asked. "Nuthin'," said the boy, "only I was wonderin' how that goldarned cat got through that hole and what it went in for."

The president often joked about the number of brigadier generals he was making. To a gentleman who was one day urging the appointment of another Lincoln objected that there were already more generals than they knew what to do with. The visitor still insisted, whereat Lincoln said:

Now, look here, you are a farmer, I believe. Suppose you had a large cattle yard full of all sorts of cattle—cows, oxen, bulls—and you kept killing and disposing of your cows and oxen, but took good

care of your bulls. By and by you would find that you had nothing but a yard full of old bulls, good for nothing under heaven. Now, it will be just so with the army if I don't stop making brigadier generals.

Another time it was reported that a detachment of cavalry and a youthful brigadier from New York had been captured. Mr. Lincoln said he was sorry to lose the horses.

"What do you mean?" he was asked. "Why," he rejoined, "I can make a brigadier any day, but those horses cost money."

Despite the brilliancy of Senator Charles Sumner, he was cordially disliked by President Lincoln. In the early part of the war Sumner, Wade and Thad Stevens pestered the patient Lincoln much on the subject of emancipation, for which he was not ready at that time. One day, glancing out of the window, he saw the trio approaching and remarked to a visitor that it reminded him of an incident of his school days. His class had been trying to pronounce the names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and had finally succeeded. The teacher was not satisfied, but insisted on a repetition, beginning with Lincoln, who was at the head of the class. Thereupon the small boy at the foot began to cry. When asked what was the matter he blubbered, "Don't you see them three cusses are coming this way again?"

In the darkest and most troublesome days of the war a sympathetic friend remarked to Mr. Lincoln:

"This bejap president isn't all it is cracked up to be, is it?"

"No," said Lincoln. "I feel sometimes like the Irishman who after being ridden on a rail said, 'Begorry, if it wasn't for the honor av th' thing I'd rather walk.'"

This recalls another story of the dark days when one generous soul came to the president with sincere and heartfelt words of praise. Lincoln thanked him cordially and remarked that he did not receive too many such compliments. Then he told one of the best and most popular of all the characteristic Lincoln anecdotes:

One day in Indiana a long legged Hoosier appeared with a great chunk of gingerbread which he was industriously stuffing into his mouth with both hands. The boys came around and laughed loudly, but he of the gingerbread paid not the slightest heed. A crowd gathered, but he continued his feast until it was all gone. Then he brushed away the crumbs from his mouth and remarked with a satisfied sigh:

"I reckon I like gingerbread better than any man in Indiana and get less of it."

If Abraham Lincoln loved praise, or, rather, appreciation—as what healthy, candid man does not?—he died too soon to get his fill of it. Yet if he could live now, when the whole world is ringing with his plaudits, certainly some of the pain would leave

his tired eyes and the sadness would be smoothed from his furrowed face.

Many men have left their testimony of Lincoln's narrative gift. It is well that we let a few of these speak here.

General Lew Wallace, the famous author of "Ben-Hur," said of Lincoln's conversational power:

"I have never heard anything that approached it. The logic, the wit, the pertinent anecdote poured out in an unceasing stream."

Schuyler Colfax, speaker of the house and later vice president, one night visited the president when important news was expected from Antietam. He remarked as he went in that no news had come. He went out and returned at 3 in the morning, and there was still no news.

"Schuyler, what does it all mean?" said Lincoln wearily. "Are we not on God's side? We have thought that we were." Then, with a gesture of despair, he added, "I would gladly exchange places tonight with any dead soldier boy on the battlefield."

The next morning Colfax went to the capitol and asked several representatives if they had any news of the battle.

"No," was the reply, "but we have seen Lincoln, and he seems to be feeling so good and told so many stories that everything must be all right."

In recounting this story Robert C. Ogden, lecturer and philanthropist, said it "illustrated the wonderful power of President Lincoln in the dark days of the war cloaking his real feelings in order that the country might not suffer from depression."

Some Lincoln Stories

A HARD-LOOKING fellow once drew a gun on Mr. Lincoln. "Abe" was surprised naturally enough; but he managed to say as calmly as possible:

"What seems to be the matter?"

"Well," said the stranger, "some years ago, I swore that if ever I came across an uglier man than myself I'd shoot him on the spot."

"Shoot me," said Lincoln with a twinkle in his eye, "for if I'm an uglier man than you are, I don't want to live."

LINCOLN had his own way of silencing the loud-mouthed "smart Alecks" who sometimes heckled him during his campaign speeches.

One night in Illinois, he stopped his speech and, turning toward his tormentor, said:

"This noisy friend reminds me of a certain steamboat that used to run in the Illinois River. It was an energetic boat—always busy. When they built



"Come what will, I will keep my faith with friend and foe."

"I have not willingly planted a thorn in any man's bosom."

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

it, however, they made one serious mistake. The boiler on this boat was a 'six-footer' and did all that was required of it in pushing the boat along; but as the builders of the boat made the whistle a 'six-footer' also, the consequence was that every time the whistle blew, the boat had to stop."

The heckler was not heard from again.

"I WAS speaking one time to Mr. Lincoln," said Governor Saunders of Nebraska, "of a little Nebraskan settlement on the 'Weeping Water'—a little stream in our State.

"'Weeping Water?' said he, 'Well, seeing as how Minnehaha is 'laughing water,' I suppose the Indians out there call your river the Minneboohoo, don't they?'"

ONE day President Lincoln was visiting in a Washington hospital. Among the convalescent soldiers who stood to receive him was a private from the 140th Pennsylvania Infantry, who was six

feet and seven inches in his stockings. Lincoln approached him and after looking him over from top to toe, he held out his hand and exclaimed: "Hello, comrade; do you know when you're feet get cold?"

STRANGELY, it was the man who took the "oath of allegiance" to the United States Government to Lincoln, when he volunteered for service in the Black Hawk War. Maybe "Abe" didn't need it as much as "Jeff" Davis did.

AN ILLINOIS farmer had just bought and penned up a prize hog. His two sons, James and John, had orders not to let the hog out. But James, somehow, let him out one day and the hog took straight after the two boys. John climbed a tree and the hog chased James around the tree and caught him by the seat of his trousers. The only way the boy could save himself was by holding onto the hog's tail. And so they kept circling the tree until the boy began to lose courage. Finally, he shouted up to his brother:

"I say, John, come down quick and help me let go of this hog."

A. Lincoln, Teller of Stories

*There Was an Effectiveness About Lincoln's Tale-Telling
that Marked Him as Distinguished In that Field*

PRESIDENT Lincoln could accomplish more through the telling of a plain homely story than most men in public life have been able to do through lengthy conversations, wordy conferences, or the appointing of investigating committees. This was likewise true of things that he put in writing. He could, for instance, say more in one sentence on the back of a visiting card, and make his meaning clearer, than many officials can do in ten minutes dictation to a stenographer.

He had the knack of turning down individuals or delegations by telling a story in such a way as to make them as pleased as though they had gotten what they wanted. And he could, by the same method, effectively rebuke, or put a quietus on those who impudently tried to take charge of his affairs and tell him how he ought to conduct the Presidency or the war. He seemed always to have a story ready that would fit any and all occasions.

HIS disposal of a case in the Navy Department where some functionary had wrongly charged a prominent business man with having defrauded the government out of \$2,200 is a sample of his brevity and justice. It reads:

"Whereas ———— had transactions with the Navy Department to the amount of a million and a quarter dollars; and, whereas, he had the chance to steal a quarter of a million, and was only charged with stealing \$2,200—and the question now is about his stealing a hundred—I don't believe he stole anything at all. Therefore, the record and findings are disapproved—declared null and void, and the defendants are fully discharged."

A loquacious preacher, of the political variety, called at the White House during the dark days of the Civil War and said he hoped "the Lord was on our side."

"I am not at all concerned about that," replied Lincoln, "for I know that the Lord is always on the side of the right. But it is my constant anxiety and prayer that I and this nation should be on the Lord's side."

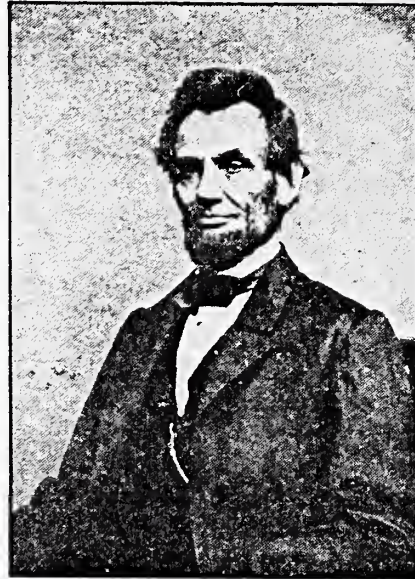
One day an inquisitive visitor asked Lincoln how many men the Confederates had in the field.

"Twelve hundred thousand, according to the best authority," replied the President without smiling.

"Good gracious! As many as that?" exclaimed the questioner in frightened tones.

"Yes, sir, twelve hundred thousand—no doubt of it. You see, all of our generals, when they get whipped, say the enemy outnumbers them from three or five to one, and I must believe them. We have four hundred thousand men in the field, and three times four makes twelve."

By HENRY OLNEY
Nat Republic FEB 28



As Lincoln Looked In 1865

Presumably the questioner saw the point. When asked what he thought of the bitter opposition to him of a certain New York editor, Lincoln said: "It reminds me of a traveller on horseback out on the frontier in the early days. A terrific thunder storm came up. He floundered along until his horse played out. The lightning afforded him the only clew to his way, but the peals of thunder were frightful. One furious bolt seemed to crash the earth beneath him. He immediately dropped to his knees, and began to pray. His petition was short and decidedly to the point: 'Oh Lord, if it is all the same to you, give us a little more light and a little less noise!'"

LINCOLN was never awed or excited by hearing from royalty or the presence of titled persons. An Austrian count, booted and spurred, was introduced to the President by the Austrian minister who explained that the count desired to enter the American army. An introduction of this character was quite sufficient without any further recommendations. The count, however, felt that his importance had not been sufficiently emphasized, and reiterated that he was a count, and that his family were ancient and highly respectable. Lincoln smiled in a fatherly sort of way, and gently tapping the count on the shoulder, said: "Oh, that is all right young man. Never mind. You shall be treated with just as much consideration for all of that."

When the Prince of Wales became engaged to Princess Alexandra, Queen Victoria sent a letter to President Lincoln through her American Minister, Lord Lyons, who happened to be a bachelor. Through the Secretary of State, an audience was arranged at the White House.

"May it please Your Excellency," said Lord Lyons, "I hold in my hand an autographed letter from my royal mistress, Queen Victoria, which I have been commanded to present to Your Excellency. In it she informs Your Excellency, that her son, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, is about to contract a matrimonial alliance with Her Royal Highness the Princess Alexandra of Denmark."

After continuing this line of talk for a few minutes, Lyons, with impressive formality, tendered the letter to the President, and awaited his reply. The response was made in seven words:

"Lord Lyons, go thou and do likewise."

Never before nor since has a British ambassador been handled in such amusing and breezy fashion.

Voluminous reports by experts on various subjects always annoyed Lincoln. A committee (Continued on page 43)



This Was the First Monument of Lincoln Erected Anywhere In the United States After His Death; It Was Placed In Front of the Courthouse In Washington, D. C., Removed a Few Years Ago, but Now Has Been Replaced There

mittee appointed to report on a newly invented gun sent in a report of several hundred pages. Throwing it down in disgust, Lincoln said: "I should want a new lease of life to read this through. Why can't a committee of this kind occasionally exhibit a grain of common sense? If I send a man to buy a horse for me, I expect him to tell me his points—not how many hairs there are in his tail."

By writing three words on some papers Lincoln brought joy to a family, according to a New York congressman who related this interesting story: "During the war a constituent came to me and stated that one of his sons was killed in a battle, and another died at Andersonville, while the third son was sick at Harper's Ferry. These disasters had such effect on his wife that she had become insane. He wanted to get this last and sick son discharged, and take him home, hoping it would restore his wife to reason. I went with him to President Lincoln and related the facts as well as I could, the father sitting by and weeping. The President, much affected, asked for the papers and wrote across them, 'Discharge this man'."

When the Secretary of War informed Lincoln of the Confederate raid at Fairfax, Va., in which a brigadier-general and a number of fine horses were captured, he gravely observed, "Well, I am sorry for the horses."

"Sorry for the horses, Mr. President!" exploded Secretary Stanton.

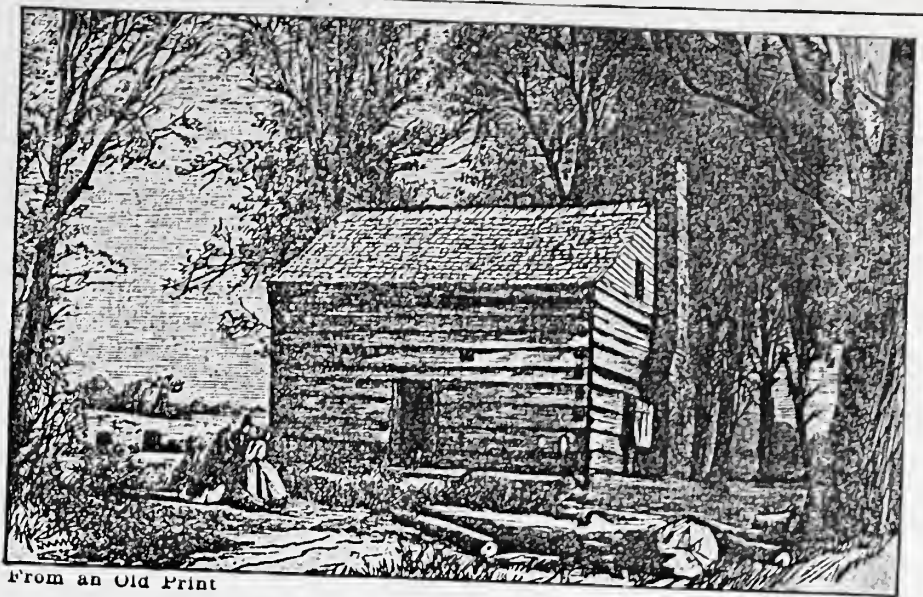
"Yes," replied Lincoln, "I can make a brigadier-general in five minutes, but it is not easy to replace a hundred and ten horses."

WHEN Lincoln was a member of the Illinois Legislature that body was frequently annoyed by a member from Wabash County who always found something unconstitutional in every bill that came up for consideration. He became a general nuisance. Finally, the other members called upon Lincoln to devise some method of shutting him up.

The next day a measure came up in which Lincoln's constituents were interested. It was his chance. The gentleman from Wabash arose and riddled the bill with constitutional objections.

Then Lincoln took the floor and told this story: "Mr. Speaker, the attack of the member from Wabash on the constitutionality of this measure, reminds me of an old friend of mine. He's a peculiar looking old fellow, with shaggy, overhanging eyebrows, and a pair of spectacles under them. (Everybody turned to the member from Wabash, and recognized a personal description.) One morning just after the old man got up, he imagined on looking out of his door, that he saw a lively squirrel on a tree near his house. So he took down his rifle and fired at the squirrel, but the squirrel paid no attention to the shot. He loaded and fired again and again, until, at the thirteenth shot, he set down his gun impatiently, and said to his boy, who was looking on: 'Boy, there's something wrong with this rifle.' 'Rifle's all right, I know 'tis,' responded the boy, 'but where's your squirrel?'"

"Don't you see him, humped up about half way up the tree?" inquired the old



From an Old Print

White Pigeon Church Where Lincoln Attended Services In His Early Life

man, peering over his spectacles, and getting mystified.

"No, I don't," responded the boy, and then turning and looking into his father's face, he exclaimed, 'I see your squirrel! You've been firing at a louse on your eyebrow!'"

The story needed no explanation. The house was in an uproar of laughter. The member from Wabash was a dead duck from that time on.

Lincoln was always opposed to the use of strong drink. This phase of his personal character was distinctly brought out when a committee from the Chicago convention called upon him at his home in Springfield, Ill., and notified him of his nomination for President.

Following the ceremonies Lincoln remarked that as an appropriate conclusion to a conference so important and interesting, he supposed good manners would require that he should treat the committee with something to drink. Opening a door that led into a room in the rear, he called out "Mary! Mary!" A girl responded to the call. To her Mr. Lincoln spoke a few words in an undertone, and, closing the door, returned again to converse with his guests. In a few minutes the maid entered, carrying a large waiter, containing several goblets and a large pitcher, and placed it upon the center-table.

Lincoln arose, and gravely said: "Gentlemen, we must pledge our mutual healths in the most healthy beverage which God has given to man—it is the only beverage I have ever used or allowed in my family, and I cannot conscientiously depart from it on the present occasion—it is pure Adam's ale from the spring." Taking a goblet, he touched it to his lips, and pledged them his highest respects in a glass of cold water. Of course, all his guests were constrained to admire his consistency, and to join in his example.

Still Another Lincoln Story

By Rev. Dr. Robert W. McLaughlin

Worcester Evening Gazette Feb. 7, 1931

IF Abraham Lincoln actually told all the stories credited to him, then his sole occupation was that of a storyteller. But as he earned his living clerking in a store, surveying land, practicing law, and during four tragic years guided the nation, the suspicion is well grounded that most of these stories are fictitious. For this reason, when a new story appears, like the fabled gift horse, it is scanned with critical eye, and two questions are asked. One, who is the person with hardihood enough to offer still another anecdote? The other, is the anecdote offered characteristic of the great man?

As regards the first question the answer is Opie Read. Unknown to this generation, this extravagantly humorous writer attracted attention a generation ago as editor of the *Arkansaw Traveller*, a kind of publication that flourished before the newspapers had their funny men columns and comic strips. I had supposed him in his grave. But, lo and behold, the other day he came to life in a gossipy and rather tiresome book, entitled "I Remember," in which he tells of meeting about 50 years ago in an Arkansas town a retired business man, by name, McCormack. While in business at St. Louis, this man had retained the law firm of Lincoln & Herndon to attend to a legal matter having to do with the title to land. This required a visit to Springfield. Now let McCormack tell the story as recorded by Opie Read:

"One evening I sat with Lincoln in his office, the door closed, the fire muttering. 'Man is humiliated only when he feels that his weakness has been spied upon,' I recall having said. 'He has no self-shame. As long as he can hide the beast within him he asserts his moral strength. But if even the humblest, a Negro, spies upon it he feels his weakness.'

"Lincoln slowly shook his head. 'I don't agree with you. A rat gnaws alone; so does a moral weakness within us, even though we know that it is securely hidden. I have seen a dog, alone, become suddenly ashamed of himself and sneak off.'

"'But the dog must have known that you saw him.'

"'No, when I was hidden from his view. Now I don't know what the soul is, but whatever it is I know that it can humble itself.'"

The above story sounds like Lincoln. Having been a fairly close student of Lincoln literature for many years, the stamp of his mind, it seems to me, is as clearly on this incident as the water mark in a given brand of superior paper. But one more skillful than myself in the handling of biographical data, Gamaliel Bradford, in a recent number of the *Saturday Review*, rejoices in this coming to light of still another genuine Lincoln story. For, as he writes, it has the quaintness and flavor peculiar to the great Emancipator.

But there is more internal evidence as to its authenticity. Here as always, the story has a point. Father Abraham, as the soldiers affectionately called him, constantly brooded over the meaning of human existence. And when the humor welled up from the depths of his soul, it always brought with it, like a wave bearing on its crest a floating spar, some illuminating thought about life. And the thought or point in this story is found in the closing words: "Now I don't know what the soul is, but whatever it is I know that it can humble itself."

ABE LINCOLN, THE STORY-TELLER

Gags and Humorous Anecdotes Were Employed to Illustrate Points in His Work as Lawyer, Politician and President. *Kans. City Star*

"Long Remember."

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth—Lincoln's address at Gettysburg National cemetery November 19, 1863.

By LLOYD LEWIS.

(Author of "Myths After Lincoln," and Other Civil War Biographies, "Sherman: Fighting Prophet," Etc.)

IN addition to his greater talents, Abraham Lincoln had a gift that, were he alive today, and not employed in government, would have made him a fortune as a gag-writer for radio comedians. Insisting that he never coined any of his famous stories, he nevertheless had what the best of the radio humor writers have today, an artistic ability to rearrange, condense, rephrase and sharpen folk-jokes and comic situations into a form that was all his own.

His stories were helped immeas-

urably, when he told them, by his own amazing talent for quizzical, droll comedy—a delivery perhaps as funny as Mark Twain's, a use of facial expression perhaps as irresistible as Charlie Chaplin's.

He seldom employed humor except to illustrate a point that had come up in conversation and he apparently usually used a drawl for comic



ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

(From an original drawing by Mathew Zimmer, Chicago artist.)

effect. Nevertheless, the point of his humor characteristically came with the same crisp, crackling speed used by the highest salaried gag-writers today.

At a church meeting the rival candidates for Congress, the Rev. Peter Cartwright and Lincoln, appeared before the voters. The preacher spoke first and insinuated strongly that his opponent was an agnostic, a heretic and possibly an infidel. Lincoln waited patiently. The preacher said, "Now, will all those who are going to heaven stand up?" All rose but Lincoln. Cartwright turned in triumph at having thus linked Lincoln and Satan, and cried "And Mr. Lincoln where are you going?"

Lincoln stood up and said, "I'm going to Congress."

Once he and a friend were discussing a profound, solemn, celebrated historian of their time. The friend said, "It may be doubted

whether any man of our generation has plunged more deeply in the sacred fount of learning." Lincoln quipped, "Or come up dryer."

Lincoln told of a friend who, when named to examine and inspect the state prisons, gave the first penitentiary so conscientious and thorough an inspection that he got lost in the dungeon corridors down among the prisoners sentenced to life imprisonment. He stepped up to the bars of one cell and said to a convict, "Excuse me, but how do you get out of this place?"

When a pompous statesman was buried with extravagant ceremonies in Washington, Lincoln observed, "If he'd known what a big funeral he was going to have he'd have died long ago."

When one of his brother lawyers on the circuit tore the seat of his trousers, joking colleagues started signing a subscription to buy him a new pair of pants. Lincoln looked over the list of names and then solemnly wrote, "I can contribute nothing to the end in view."

When asked why he seemed to avoid women, Lincoln explained that he was like a neighbor boy in Indiana who had been poorer than the Lincolns were. This boy came over one day to where young Abe was eating gingerbread men, the greatest treat on the frontier. He asked for one of the men. Abe gave it to him, then for another which Abe was starting to consume. Abe gave him that and the boy wolfed it down.

"You seem to like gingerbread," said Abe.

The boy replied: "Abe, I don't s'pose anybody on earth likes gingerbread better—and gets less."

When asked how his wife's aristocratic southern family, the Todds, spelled their name, with one or two "d's," he answered, "Two. One was enough for God but not the Todds."

Lincoln told of a father who kept urging his big, bashful son to take a wife until the young man finally burst out bawling, "All right, whose wife will I take?"

Once when he was confined to his office by the contagious but not serious disease, varioloid, his secretary told him that the outer office was full of those chronic beggars for political favors, the congressmen.

"Throw open the doors; let 'em in," said the President. "At last I've got something I can give 'em."

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San Francisco, California
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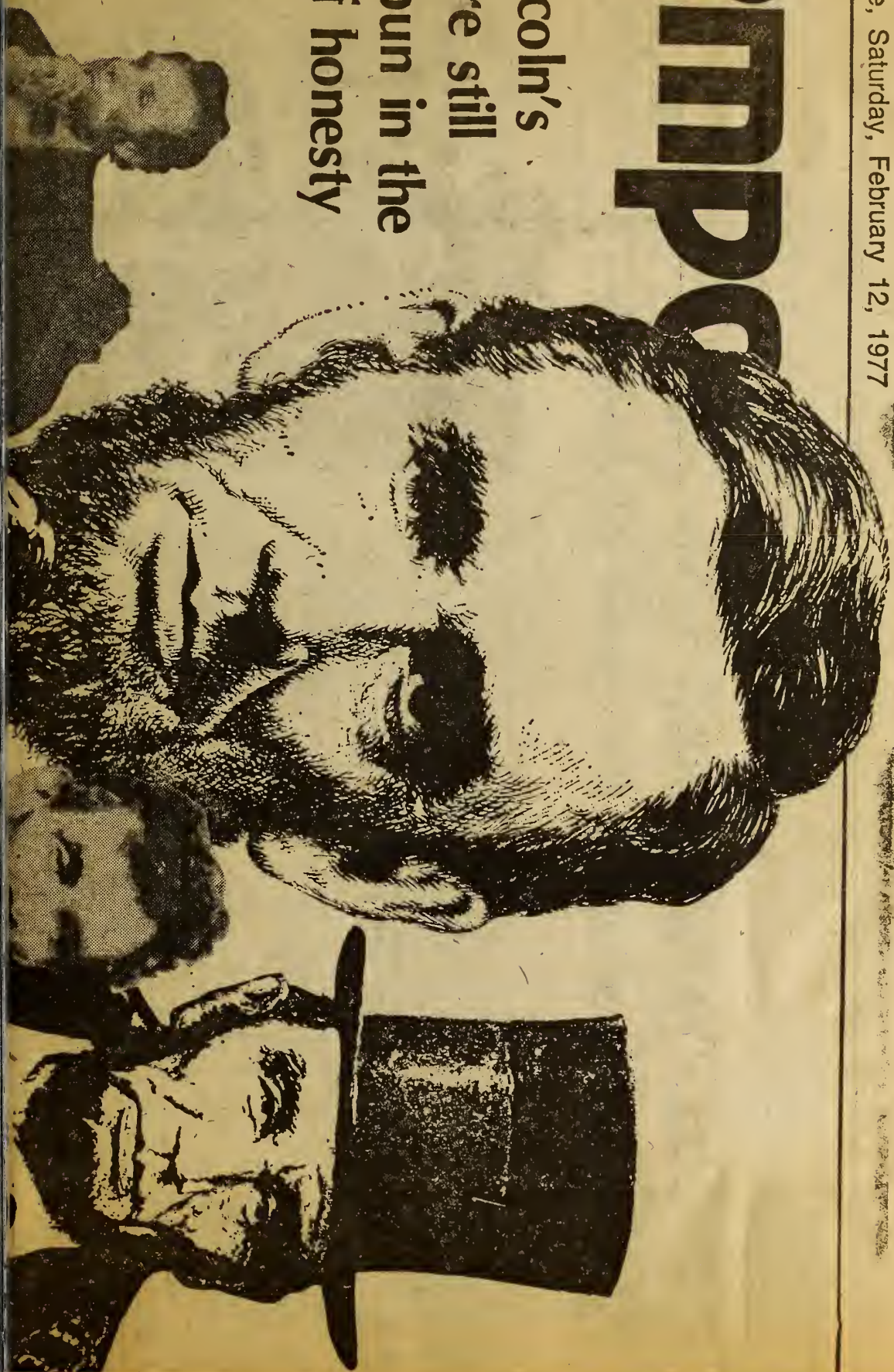
Quote & Unquote

Abraham Lincoln, in one of his famous debates with Stephen Douglas: "In my youth there was a steamboat on the Sangamon River with a boiler so small that when its whistle blew, its paddle wheel could not turn, and when the shell was moving, the whistle would not blow. My friend Douglas reminds me of that old steamboat. When he talks, he can't think. And when he thinks, he can't talk."

Chicago Tribune, Saturday, February 12, 1977

Tempo

Abe Lincoln's
yarns are still
being spun in the
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Tempo

Abe Lincoln's yarns are still being spun in the name of honesty

By Joan Zyda

ABRAM LINCOLN was a marvelous storyteller. He spun hundreds of yarns—the man and the bear, the man and the fierce dog, himself and the stagecoach rider, himself and the office-seeker, and on and on about many people and many themes.

He didn't tell these stories just to prove he had a sense of humor. He told them to clarify an argument or to convert one, and often his tales had his real purpose of throwing a persistent debater off the track.

Those stories, of course, are imitations of political folklore. And more than a century after Lincoln's death, modern politicians—many claiming to be "students of Lincoln"—use those tales to persuade, dodge, evade, and connive in a Lincolnian fashion.

Here, some prominent Americans remember their favorite Lincoln stories on this appropriate occasion—his birthday.

ACCORDING TO A White House aide, one of President Carter's favorite Lincoln tales points up Lincoln's irritation with trivia.

The story goes that Lincoln called for a committee report on a newly invented gun. The report was thick with minute details about the weapon.

"I should want a new lease of life to read this through!" said an annoyed Lincoln. And he threw the report down on the table and asked, "Why can't a committee of this kind occasionally exhibit a grain of common sense? If I send a man to buy a horse for

me, I expect him to tell me his points—not how many hairs there are in his tail."

Carter's aide said the story is a favorite because the sentiment "is what Jimmy is trying to do—consolidate departments and jobs and reduce the looming bureaucracy."

Sen. Barry Goldwater says his favorite chronicle concerns the time Lincoln saw a man walking across the street in Springfield, Ill. According to Goldwater, Lincoln pointed to the man and said, "I don't like that man." A moment later, Lincoln took it back, saying, "No, wait a minute. I don't know that man."

"I think that story is so typical of our normal reactions," the Arizona Republican said. "We don't really know people and yet we jump right in and make snap judgments."

U.S. REP. PAUL Findley's favorite Lincoln yarn is the one about the farmer and the Mormon explains it: "The Mormon explains it."

"Lincoln was asked what he thought about a controversial Mormon church out on the prairie. Lincoln said it reminded him of the farmer plowing in the center of a field when

he came onto a big log. Lincoln said the farmer found the log 'too knawled to split, too heavy to haul, and too green to burn.' So what did the farmer do about it? He plowed around it. Thus, Lincoln indicated he wanted to leave the church alone."

A similar Lincoln tale is shared by former California Gov. Ronald Reagan.

"One day in the early Indian wars in Illinois, there was this young captain. He and his troops had been marching all day when they came to a fence," Reagan said. "Well, the captain couldn't find anything in the military manual which would apply to such a situation, so he ordered his men to 'fall out and fall in' on the other side of the fence."

"The whole point of that story is people should display common sense," Reagan remarked.

PATRICIA SCHROEDER, the liberal congresswoman from Colorado, said the often-used Lincoln quote on the subject of war to further her arguments before the House Armed Services Committee, of which she is a member: "Gentlemen, a war is not a

Continued on following page

'New traditions' fill Chicago's history

By Eleanor Page

A POSTER IN THE literature section of the Chicago Historical Society's Bicentennial exhibit, "Chicago—Creating New Traditions," is a reminder that turn-of-the-century folk could entertain themselves and their friends without professional help. And if the energy crunch should curtail theater, movie, or concert performances, the day of the amateur performer may return!

Fancy being summoned to the Bird Center Opera House for a "Stupendous Tragedy Entitled Cap Fry's Birthday Party?" That was the entertainment plan for the night of Jan. 30, 1904, by a cultural group known as the Little Room. It was one of several headquartered in the Fine Arts Building, 419 S. Michigan Ave., which became a rendezvous for writers and artists after it opened in 1898. The Little Room had been founded six years earlier.

According to the poster advertising the event, George Ade wrote the words for the tragedy, Anna Morgan was dramatist, and it was acted by a "Galaxy of Historic Stars, First and Last Appearance."

The "galaxy" included Ade's long-time friend and Tribune cartoonist John T. McCutcheon as "Riley Peters, with a Hundred Sweethearts"; George Barr McCutcheon as "Capt. Fry, a Wild Soldier and Tame Husband"; Howard Van Doren Shaw as "J. Milton Brown, a (fun) Type of Bird Center Aristocracy";

Continued on following page

Boehm team builds a dynasty

Flights of fancy in porcelain

By Dee Wedemeyer

TO A STORE buyer from Chicago, Helen Boehm is the "movie star of the porcelain business."

To Rose Palley, the New Jersey art dealer who is the largest purveyor of Boehm porcelain in the world, she is a woman of incredible energy.

"I'm not a guy of low energy myself," Palley said, "but in Helen's presence all I can do is gape."

For two decades Helen Boehm, laden with samples, stirring up publicity, approaching the rich and powerful, and everyone that her husband, Edward Marshall Boehm, was the greatest American porcelain artist.

After his death in 1969, she said she had to convince many of the same people that the Boehm studio in Trenton, N.J., could continue without him.

HER HUSBAND sculpted mostly birds and animals, and all but 10 of his 48 limited editions have sold out. But now the Boehm team (the words rhyme) presents (she does not like the words "produces" or "manufactures") paintings, figures (she also does not like the word "figurines"), flowers, and plates.

Prices range from \$32 for a plate with a gamebird motif to \$9,500 for a life-size pelican.

Edward Marshall Boehm, Inc., of which Mrs.

Continued on following page



Monday in Tempo

More than a century after Kunta Kinte was enslaved, Cynthia became his first descendant to be married as a free woman. Tempo picks up the continuation of "Roots" with the death of Chicken George and the marriage author Alex Haley's grandmother.

SAYS LINCOLN'S STORIES IN BARROOM WERE BEST

Former Senator Patterson Tells of Meeting 'Abe' in Backwoods,
Before He Was Known to Nation

BACK in 1850, when Abraham Lincoln was still just an Illinois lawyer, unknown even in name to the majority of his countrymen, a youth from Pennsylvania, who happened to be traveling through the western state, remote in the days of stage coaches and few railroads, caught a picture of the future war President, which remains with him to this day.

The youth has now turned 80 years, but the mental images of several hours spent in a dingy little room off the bar of an Illinois tavern and especially of the figure which dominated it are still fresh with the vividness of life.

And those impressions, tinged and heightened now, as everything in the life of Lincoln, by his noble service to the Union and by his tragic taking off, reveal the human Lincoln, the man before he became the oppressed and melancholy arbiter in a mighty war. They show him on his native heath, living his life as his instincts bade him, rather than as his stern sense of duty compelled him to live.

Comfortably seated in a great armchair at the Hotel Normandie in this city, former United States Senator John Patterson, a Pennsylvanian by birth, and residence, but a senator from South Carolina during the reconstruction days, told of the time when, as a youth of 20, he first saw Abraham Lincoln.

Chased a Cattle Thief.

"I was a young chap, just out of college, and living in Juniata county, Pennsylvania, when by a freak chance I got the opportunity to take a trip out through the western country," said Mr. Patterson. "Or, rather, I made the chance for myself. In those days there was but little actual money used in business transactions back in the country, and it was usually a case of bartering off one class of goods for another.

"Now, a man in our town, Academia, walked off in one of these bartering transactions with a herd of cattle, and took them down stream. Of course, there was a big rumpus, but he got away from us and no one knew where he had slipped to until about a year later, when a girl in the town got a letter from him asking her to come out to Illinois to join him and marry him.

"He gave his residence as Berlin, Illinois, on the Fox river. It was a new town and had just got a postoffice. When I got wind of the fact that the cattle thief was out there the spirit of adventure seized me, and I put the proposition up to the man from whom the cattle had been stolen that he should pay my traveling expenses and let me go for the man.

"After considerable hemming and hawing and persuasion of my parents I finally got away. It was a big undertaking in those days, and I would never have started at all if I had realized what I had to go through. Hundreds and hundreds of miles had to be travelled on stage coaches, many of them without springs and on abominable roads.

"But I was game, and after I had gone all the way out there I got the aid of the first Governor of Wisconsin, in the Indian reservation of which state my man had taken refuge. I captured the fellow and brought him all the way back home. Not so bad for a kid of 20, was it?

"It was while on this trip that I hauled into Springfield, Ill., late one afternoon, after traveling two nights and a day in a 'mud wagon,' the abomination of road travelers in those days. Of course, we alighted at the stage office, which was then the core of the town, the center for

the reception and distribution of all news from the outside world. Here I happened to be lucky enough to run into a man from my own state of Pennsylvania. We took dinner together, and after dinner my chance companion, who was much older than I was, invited me into the bar. We went into a dingy, dirty little room back of the barroom and I noticed that on a table in the room there were whisky bottles and green glasses. I remarked to my friend that this was strange, as there was no one in the room at the time.

Distinguished Men in Bar.

"But it didn't take us long to find that there was nothing strange about it, for in a short time men began to come in by twos and threes, and soon there was gathered a group that filled the room.

"We took back seats and listened to the round of hilarity and funny stories that soon began to fly as the whisky was consumed in amazing quantities. My friend pointed out that in the company there were some of the distinguished men of the state, Stephen A. Douglass among them.

"They were, all of them, good story tellers, and I roared until my sides ached at their ludicrous yarns. In the middle of the room there was a big wood stove, which almost completely hid from my view a man who seemed to be telling the stories that made the biggest hits of all. About all I could see of him were his big feet, which were high in the air on the edge of the stove. They all addressed him with the greatest of affection as 'Abe.'

"I did not realize how fast the time was flying, as they swapped their stories of the happenings in court at Galena and elsewhere. Finally the man on the other side of the stove said he guessed he'd have to be going home, as it was getting very late. The men protested vigorously and kept repeating 'Just one more story before you go, Abe.' That process was gone through several times, each time with another story and a better one, until the man pulled his enormous feet off the stove and rose to leave, amid general protest.

"I can see him now, standing over there. I had not realized what a big man he was. He towered above everybody in that little room. He pulled out his watch slowly and then smiled.

"Well, boys, it's 11 o'clock now. I didn't know it was so late. But I reckon Mrs. Lincoln is as mad now as she can

get. So I might as well stay on a little while longer."

"There was a shout of laughter and of approval and the big man wound himself up again and sank down back of the stove, his feet coming up once more into my line of vision. And the stories kept on flying. Lincoln—when he mentioned his wife's name, it was the first time I had ever heard the name in my life—had to do most of the talking, for most of the others were too drunk. Lincoln didn't drink anything.

"The next day on top of the stage-coach I asked my traveling companion who Lincoln was. He replied that he was the best criminal lawyer in the state, and was a sure comer, for he was always in demand wherever he went. I went on my way and thought little more about it. Only the way he said that about Mrs. Lincoln being as mad as she could get and that he might as well take the fullest advantage of it remained in my mind as one of the funniest things, as it was said, I had ever heard.

"When I went back home I jumped right into politics and was in the state Legislature from 1859 until 1861. When I heard of Lincoln in his famous debates with Douglass I was always curious to ascertain whether it was that big chap in the back of the barroom. I didn't see exactly how it could be. For that man hardly looked the caliber.

"In the great convention that nominated Lincoln in Chicago I was a delegate from this state. Pennsylvania had a great deal to do in nominating Lincoln. I kept inquiring about him to find out whether it was my friend of ten years back, but I couldn't be sure until his portrait was carried through the hall after he was nominated.

First Meeting With Lincoln.

"The first time I had a chance to talk with Lincoln was when, as a member of a committee of the Pennsylvania Legislature, I went to meet him near Harrisburg and invite him to go over to Harrisburg. This was after his first election. His train had been held up by a freight wreck and we had to go out to him on a special. We found him seated in his car, his feet way up in the air over the ear seat in front of him. When we told him we wanted him to come over to Harrisburg and that we were a committee of the Legislature, appointed to invite him, he began to unwind himself. I thought his legs were going up through the roof of the car, they were so long. He turned, after he had risen, to one of his officials, and said:

"You're managing this show. Where do we exhibit next? Get out the engagement book." Then he looked over his list of engagements and fixed on a date.

"I'll come over, then, boys, if you'll let me," he said. "I want to get acquainted with you boys in Pennsylvania. You were mighty good to me in Chicago.

"Then he insisted on our staying in his car with him and sending our special on up ahead. In no time we were the best friends possible, and he was telling us his incomparable stories.

"I mentioned to him the incident of the evening in the Springfield barroom and he roared and roared, particularly when I repeated the remark he made about Mrs. Lincoln.

"Then he grew thoughtful. 'Y-e-s,' he drawled, 'I did use to go down there with the boys a lot, that's true.'

"And he looked in his eyes as though he wished he still might be able to go down in the evenings and shove his feet up on the edge of that wood stove and just swap yarns."

CONGR

Stories He Did Tell.

IN a nation fond of anecdote and apt illustration Lincoln was in his day the chiefest performer in those lines. The anecdotes attributed to him would fill many volumes, and of those which have been authenticated there are several hundred. We select what appears on this page from well known sources, men who really heard him tell the story or apply the illustration. To one man Lincoln said that he could not remember having really originated a story. Because he liked them he had no trouble remembering any good stories or droll sayings. This was not so remarkable as his instantaneous fitting of a state or military situation with an anecdote which seemed to point to that situation and to no other. Like a flash his face would light up and then would follow a story which, crude and vulgar though it sometimes was, took on point and dignity when fitted to the case in question.

It is said he never repeated himself, which if true is really wonderful, and that only once was he stumped. After some one had laid his grievance before him, he wrinkled his brow and exclaimed: "It doesn't seem to me that that reminds me of anything."

Lincoln's sense of humor was his saving grace. Without it he might have gone stark, raving mad during the horrors of the civil war. Besides the stock of stories which he had memorized he often read Nasby's writings, those of "Orpheus C. Kerr" and "John Phoenix." He annoyed such men as Judge Advocate Holt, Stanton, and the other members of the cabinet by reading from these humorists on the most solemn occasions, and Stanton more than once rebuked him for interrupting serious business with jests of this sort.

Senator Lane told George W. Julian that "when Lincoln heard a story that pleased him he took a memorandum of it and filed it away among his papers. This was probably true. At any rate, by some method or other, his supply seemed inexhaustible and always aptly available. He entered into the enjoyment of his stories with all his heart, and completely lived over again the delight he had experienced in telling them on previous occasions. When he told a particularly good story, and the time came to laugh, he would sometimes throw his left foot across his right knee, and clinching his foot with both hands and bending forward, his whole frame seemed to be convulsed with the effort to give expression to his sensations. His laugh was like that of the hero of 'Sartor Resartus,' 'a laugh of the whole man from head to heel.' I believe his anecdotes were his great solace and safeguard in seasons of severe mental depression."

From His Uncle.

Lincoln is said to have inherited his sense of humor from his uncle, Mordecai. He certainly didn't get it from his father, Thomas. One who knew the family in the early days says:

"I had known his relatives in Kentucky, and he had asked me about them. His uncle, Mordecai Lincoln, I had known from my boyhood, and he was naturally a man of considerable genius; he was a man of great drollery, and it would almost make you laugh to look at him. I never saw but one other man whose quiet droll look excited in me the same disposition to laugh, and that was Artemus Ward. He was quite a storyteller, and in this Abe resembled his uncle, Mord, as we called him. He was an honest man, as tender hearted as a woman, and to the last degree charitable and benevolent."

Chauncey Depew says that "Mr. Lincoln's avidity for a new story was great. I remember once at a reception, as the line was passing and he was shaking hands with each one in the usual way, that he stopped a friend of mine who was moving immediately ahead of me. He whispered something in his ear, and then listened attentively for five minutes—the rest of us waiting, devoured with curiosity as to what great secret of state could have so singularly interrupted the festival. I seized my friend the instant we passed the president, as did everybody else who knew him, to find out what the communication meant. I learned that he had told Mr. Lincoln a first class anecdote a few days before, and the president, having forgotten the point, had arrested the movement of 3,000 guests in order to get it on the spot."

School of Anecdote.

To Depew also he said: "I have but originated two stories in my life, but I tell tolerably well other people's stories." He said that, "riding the circuit for many years and stopping at country taverns where were gathered the lawyers, jurymen, witnesses, and clients, they would sit up all night narrating to each other their life adventures, and that the things which happened to an original people, in a new country, surrounded by novel conditions and told with the descriptive power and exaggeration which characterized such men, supplied him with an exhaustless fund of anecdotes which could be made applicable for enforcing or refuting an argument better than all the invented stories of the world."

According to David R. Locke ["Nasby"], "his flow of humor was a sparkling spring gushing out of a rock—the flashing water had a somber background which made it all the brighter. Whenever merriment came over that wonderful countenance it was like a gleam of sunshine upon a cloud—it illuminated, but did not dissipate. The premonition of fate was on him then; the shadow of the tragic closing of the great destiny in the beyond had already enveloped him." Locke also continues:

"Lincoln was essentially epigrammatic and parabolic. He was a master of satire, which was at times as blunt as a meat ax and at others as keen as a razor; but it was always kindly except when some horrible injustice was its inspiration, and then it was terrible. Weakness he was never ferocious with, but intentional wickedness he never spared."

"In this interview the name came up of a recently deceased politician of Illinois whose undeniable merit was blemished by an overweening vanity. His funeral was largely attended. 'If Gen. ——— had known how big a funeral he would have had,' said Mr. Lincoln, 'he would have died years ago.'"

Nasby and the Returns.

Dana in his reminiscences gives this instance of Lincoln pulling the safety valve:

"Another side of this remarkable character was illustrated on the evening of election day in November. The political struggle had been most intense, and the interest taken in it, both in the White house and in the war department, had been almost painful. All the power and influence of the war department, then something enormous from the vast expenditure and extensive relations of the war, had been employed to secure the reelection of Mr. Lincoln, and after the arduous toil of the canvass there was necessarily a great suspense of feeling until the result of the voting should be ascertained. I went over to the war department about half past 8 in the evening and found the president and Mr. Stanton together in the secretary's office. Gen. Eckert, who then had charge of the telegraph department of the war office, was coming in continually with telegrams containing election returns. Mr. Stanton would read them and the president would look at them and comment upon them. Presently there came a lull in the returns, and Mr. Lincoln called me up to a place by his side."

"Dana," said he, "have you ever read any of the writings of Petroleum V. Nasby?" "No, sir," I said. "I have only looked at some of them and they seemed to me quite funny."

"Well," said he, "let me read you a specimen," and, pulling out a thin, yellow covered pamphlet from his breast pocket, he began to read aloud. Mr. Stanton viewed this proceeding with great impatience, as I could see, but Mr. Lincoln paid no attention to that. He would read a page or a story, pause to con a new election telegram, and then open the book again and go ahead with a new passage. Finally Mr. Chase came in and presently Mr. Whitelaw Reid, and then the reading was interrupted. Mr. Stanton went to the door and beckoned me into the next room. I shall never forget the fire of his indignation at what seemed to him to be mere nonsense. The idea that when the safety of the republic was thus at issue, when the control of an empire was to be determined by a few figures brought in by the telegraph, the leader, the man most deeply concerned, not merely for himself but for his country, could turn aside to read such balderdash and to laugh at such frivolous jests was, to his mind, something

understand, apparently, that it was the relief which these jests afforded to the strain of mind under which Lincoln had so long been living and to the natural gloom of a melancholy and desponding temperament—this was Mr. Lincoln's prevailing characteristic—that the safety and sanity of his intelligence were maintained and preserved."

The Three Bores.

This anecdote is vouched for by Mr. Titian J. Coffey, an intimate of the president in war time:

One day, when he was alone and busily engaged on an important subject involving vexation and anxiety, he was, by some mischance, disturbed by the unwarranted intrusion of three men, who, without apology, proceeded to lay their claim before him. The spokesman of the three reminded the president that they were the owners of some torpedo or other warlike invention which, if the government would only adopt it, would soon crush the rebellion. "Now," said the spokesman, "we have been here to see you time and again. You have referred us to the secretary of war, to the chief of ordnance and the general of the army, and they give us no satisfaction. We have been kept here waiting till money and patience are exhausted, and we now come to demand a final reply to our application."

Mr. Lincoln listened quietly to this insolent tirade, and at the close the old twinkle came into his eyes.

"You three gentlemen remind me of a story I once heard," said he, "of a poor little boy out west who had lost his mother. His father wanted to give him a religious education, and so placed him in the family of a clergyman, and directed him to instruct the little fellow carefully in the scriptures. Every day the boy was required to commit to memory and recite one chapter of the bible. Things proceeded smoothly until they reached that chapter which details the story of the trials of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. The boy got on well until he was asked to repeat these three names, but he had forgotten them. His teacher told him he must learn them, and gave him another day to do so. Next day the boy again forgot them. 'Now,' said the teacher, 'you have again failed to remember those names, and you can go no further till you have learned them.' I will give you another day on this lesson, and if you don't repeat the names I will punish you.' A third time the boy came to recite, and got down to the stumbling block, when the clergyman said: 'Now tell me the names of the men in the fiery furnace.' 'O,' said the boy, 'here come those three infernal bores! I wish the devil had them!'"

Lincoln as Orator and Story Teller

BY D. W. DOW,

Representative From Franklin County.

Abraham Lincoln was a great man in Illinois long before his name was ever heard of outside of that state. His debates with Senator Douglas in 1858 gave him fame in the eastern states, and his Cooper Institute speech made him president.

The first time I ever saw Lincoln was in the days soon after the Mexican war. He was advertised to speak at a little town where we lived in the "Rock River" county in Illinois. In politics he belonged to the whigs of the Henry Clay type, who were irretrievably in the minority in that state. My father, being of his party, thinking that the audience might be slim, urged everybody to go, and took us boys to this meeting. The hall was small and father was very solicitous that it be filled. On arriving in town, it was soon discovered that everybody in town was "turning out" to hear "Honest old Abe." Seats were placed on the outside and nearly 2,000 people heard the man who was destined to take so prominent a part in the affairs of this nation.

His speech was to a certain extent upon the question of the tariff. His opponents were, he said, "in favor of protection to American industries; so am I. The only difference is in the way of getting at it. The democrats believe in an ad valorem tariff; that is, that a certain per cent upon the value be charged on all goods shipped into this country, while the whigs believe in a specific tariff; that is, a tariff on some articles of such an amount, on others a different amount, and that such commodities as could not be produced in this country—except for luxuries—should come in free; that a tariff should be of such a sum as to protect Americans in American wages, and to fully compensate capital in its investment; that to do more than this would raise the price of our home products to an exorbitant figure" (embryo Iowa Idea). When his speech was ended, three cheers were given by every one present for "Honest old Abe."

The next time I saw Lincoln was in 1855, at Bloomington, Ill. I had gone up into the court room just before the time for court to be called and in the bar fenced off sat some of the eminent lawyers of the state, and in the midst of them was Lincoln. The judge had taken his place on the bench and was about to call court when members of the bar were insisting on Lincoln's telling a story. As every one present stopped Lincoln told them about a Baptist minister down in Kentucky marrying a negro man and his sweetheart: "You take this lady you hold by your right hand to be your lawful and wedded wife, etc.?" Then turn-

ing to the girl he asked the usual questions, and then he said, "Now in the presence of Almighty God and these niggers, I pronounce you man and wife." The shout that went up was loud and long, as it always was when Lincoln told one of his stories. He had a faculty of telling his stories in such a manner that there were none that could help laughing at them.

He was dressed at the time in a blue broadcloth coat with plain brass buttons, of the cut usually known as "claw hammer," but was of the style that lawyers in those days nearly always wore.

I was present at and heard the debate between Senator Douglas and Mr. Lincoln at Freeport in the fall of 1858. Mr. Douglas had the advantage in that he stood at the head of the senate of the United States. We who were solicitous that Mr. Lincoln should fully cope with the senator felt when the senator was speaking with his sledgehammer manner of talking that Lincoln might fall behind. Our hearts sank somewhat as Mr. Lincoln arose in reply, but it was all gone after he had uttered a few sentences of his address, and when he drew himself up to his full height and raised his arm and delivered that address which has become a part of the political literature of those days we were all more than delighted.

I saw him often after that and once heard him relate his celebrated story of the exhorter at a campmeeting down near where Mr. Lincoln lived, which ran about as follows: The exhorter was zealous and somewhat illiterate in his talk, and his co-ministers had to a certain extent stood in his way, hoping they might avoid his talk, but on Monday of the campmeeting when they were about to adjourn and were pulling down their tents, the exhorter obtained the pulpit and commenced by saying in the singsong tone that was usual in those days, "Ye will find the text of my choice between the lids of the bible; it is about Noah—ah—and Noah had three sons: there was Shaddaderack, Mechlzick and Belteazer—ah—and they all went into the lion's den—ah—and the lion was there also." By this time he discovered that they were not paying attention to what he was saying, and he wound up by saying: "Well, if you won't listen unto me, I have to announce that my neighbor Johnson has lost his sorrel mare—ah—with a mangy main and tail—ah."

There were many of the stories attributed to Mr. Lincoln that very likely Mr. Lincoln never heard of, but he was a man who facilitated the communication of his ideas very often with anecdotes which he either originated himself for the occasion, or that were put in illustrating his arguments.

Lincoln's Theory of Story-telling.—Col.

Silas W. Burt, writing in the *February Century*, contributes to the literature pertaining to President Lincoln some new side-lights on his story-telling ability. On one occasion in particular, he narrates, the President was induced to speak freely on this subject, but under circumstances which were extremely embarrassing to his hearers. Colonel Burt, with two others, had come to the President on a mission from Governor Seymour, of New York, at a time when Lincoln was nearly ready to succumb to the worries and nervous trials with which the great war had burdened him. Lincoln's face told in every line the story of anxiety and weariness.

The drooping eyelids, looking almost swollen; the dark bags beneath the eyes; the deep marks about the large and expressive mouth; the flaccid muscles of the jaws, were all so majestically pitiful that I could almost have fallen on my knees and begged pardon for my part in the cruel presumption and impudence that had thus invaded his repose. As we were severally introduced, the President shook hands with us, and then took his seat on a haircloth-covered sofa beside the major, while we others sat on chairs in front of him. Colonel Van Buren, in fitting words, conveyed the message from Governor Seymour, asking the President in Governor Seymour's name to pay no attention to newspaper statements as to the Governor's unfriendliness, and assured the President of the Governor's fixed intention to fulfil any constitutional call upon him for funds to support the Government. The President replied that he had attached no importance to the rumors referred to, and that he needed no formal assurances that the Governor would do all in his power to aid him.

The merely formal talk being over, something was said about the critical condition of military matters, and the President observed that he had no fears about the safety of Washington, and was certain that the attempted invasion of the Northern States would be arrested. He said the latest intelligence from the Army of the Potomac was favorable, but gave no details, and it was not until the next day that we learned that General Meade had succeeded General Hooker.

A little pause in the conversation ensued. The gaunt figure of the President had gradually slid lower on the slippery sofa, and his long legs were stretched out in front, the loose slippers half fallen from his feet, while the drowsy eyelids had almost closed over his eyes, and his jaded features had taken on the suggestion of relaxation in sleep. I repeat that I never think of this noble man's personality without recalling him at that moment of supreme danger to the Republic and without seeing again that sad, worn countenance of the man who bore with such courage and patience his heavy burdens.

Deeply moved by the President's evident fatigue, and by his cordial treatment of us in spite of our presumptuous call, Colonel Van Buren and I were about rising to make our adieus when, to our dismay, the Major slapped the President on his knee and said:

"Mr. President, tell us one of your good stories."

If the floor had opened and dropt me out of sight, I should have been happy.

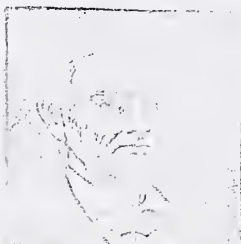
The President drew himself up, and turning his back as far as possible upon the Major, with great dignity address the rest of us, saying: "I believe I have the popular reputation of being a story-teller, but I do not deserve the name in its general

sense, for it is not the story itself, but its purpose, or effect, that interests me. I often avoid a long and useless discussion by others or a laborious explanation on my own part by a short story that illustrates my point of view. So, too, the sharpness of a refusal or the edge of a rebuke may be blunted by an appropriate story, so as to save wounded feeling and yet serve the purpose. No, I am not simply a story-teller, but story-telling as an emollient saves me much friction and distress." These are almost his exact words, of which I made a record that very night.

When the President finished, we arose and made our salutations and withdrew, our last view of our great leader being of a countenance gracious, but inexpressibly sad.

American Presidents

THE HUMOR OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN



MANY YEARS ago, a New York firm wrote to a lawyer in Springfield, Illinois, asking about the financial standing of a certain Springfield man. The lawyer replied: "Yours of the 10th received. First of all, he has a wife and a baby; together they ought to be worth \$500,000 to any man. Secondly, he has an office in which there is a table worth \$1.50 and three chairs worth, say, \$1. Last of all, there is in one corner a large rat-hole, which will bear looking into . . . Respectfully, A. Lincoln."

This is the answer of a man who would one day be President of the United States—one of our greatest presidents, and certainly the most human.

One of Lincoln's most outstanding traits was his sense of humor, yet his life was far from happy. Born in 1809 in a log cabin on the Kentucky frontier, his family moved to Indiana when he was eight. At ten, his mother died. He had little schooling, but he avidly read every book he could find. At twenty-one, he went out on his own and entered into several business ventures; but by the time he was twenty-four, he had the debts of three bankrupt stores on his hands. He became engaged to lovely Anne Rutledge. But she died before they could be married.

Abe Lincoln then took up law and hung out his shingle in Springfield, Illinois. Moderately successful as a lawyer, he went on to politics. At thirty-three, he married Mary Todd, a rather calculating woman. After some success but many political defeats, Abe was elected President of the United States. He was in the White House only a few weeks when the Civil War broke out. His years in office were probably the most trying for any chief executive. Then, less than a week after Appomattox, he was assassinated.

Though tragedy seemed to mark every turn of Lincoln's life, there was always time for a laugh, a smile. This was one of the traits that carried him to greatness.

The humor of Abe Lincoln was the good

earthly humor of frontier life and the common folk. His philosophy of life seemed to be based on but a few books and writings to which he was always referring. These were the Bible, Shakespeare, the Declaration of Independence, and Joe Miller's Joke Book.

When Lincoln was practicing law in Springfield, he would sometimes take out Joe Miller's Joke Book and read it to his fellow lawyers. Here is one of the jokes he liked and told: "Lieutenant Connolly, an Irishman in the service of the United States during the American War, chanced to take three Hessian prisoners himself, without any assistance; being asked by the commander-in-chief how he had taken them—I surrounded them," was the answer."

Though many stories Lincoln told seemed to be revised versions of some of Joe Miller's jokes, most of his tales were his own or ones he remembered from his contacts with every type and class of men.

Much of the time it was his catch wit that gave laughs to those around him. Once in a courtroom, another lawyer tore the seat of his pants. A paper asking for contributions to fix the trousers was passed among the lawyers. When it came to Lincoln, he wrote, "I can contribute nothing to the end in view."

One morning in court, a circle of people around Lincoln started to laugh. The judge angrily said, "Mr. Lincoln, I'm not going to stand for your tom-foolery any longer." And he fined Lincoln \$5.00 for disorderly conduct. Someone whispered to the judge the joke Lincoln had told. Trying to keep a straight face, the judge said, "The clerk may remit Mr. Lincoln's fine."

In 1847, Lincoln was nominated by the Whigs of Illinois to run for Congress. His opponent, a Democratic candidate, was Peter Cartwright, a Methodist minister and circuit rider. Lincoln made many campaign speeches, as did Cartwright, but near the end of the campaign, Lincoln attended a religious meeting at which Cartwright was to preach. The minister spoke and then asked of his audience that those desiring to go to heaven, "stand up." Cartwright then asked those who did not wish to go to hell to stand up. At this point, everyone was stand-

ing except "Honest Abe." Peter Cartwright looked down at him and asked, "Mr. Lincoln, where are you going?"

Lincoln rose and answered, "Brother Cartwright, I am going to Congress." And he went, too, by a large majority of votes.

Once in the years before he became President, Lincoln tried his hand at lecturing. He wrote and delivered a lecture entitled, "Discoveries and Inventions." The lecture was a flop, or as Lincoln said, "It just didn't have enough 'git' to it." But in this lecture, he said that the invention of laughter, if it could be called an invention, was one of the most important. He described laughter as "the joyous, beautiful, universal evergreen of life."

Abe Lincoln had a nice, human way of saying things that sometimes combined a touch of the poet and philosopher. Commenting on a long needed summer shower, he said, "This makes the corn laugh." When he was a young man and still unknown in New Salem, Illinois, Abe applied for a job as clerk at the polling place on Election Day. When he was asked if he could write, Abe said, "Oh, I guess I can make a few rabbit tracks." And he got the job.

He could even find a touch of humor in the fact that a store of his had gone bankrupt. He smiled and said it had "winked out."

During 1858, Lincoln campaigned vigorously against Stephen A. Douglas for the election as Senator from Illinois. The now famous Lincoln-Douglas debates were waged, but though Lincoln bested Douglas on the platform, his views on slavery were still too advanced for the time, and he lost the election. It was a bitter defeat for Abe and he summed up his feelings by saying, "I felt like the boy who had stubbed his toe—too badly to laugh, and too big to cry."

Lincoln could often use a pun to good advantage. Once during the trying of a law case, Abe kept using the legal term "lien" with his own pronunciation as "lean." The fussy judge kept correcting him, telling him the word was pronounced "lion." After being corrected several times by the judge, Abe said, "If my client had known there was a lion on his farm, he wouldn't have stayed there long enough to bring this suit."

Perhaps it came naturally to Lincoln to have a touch of the comic in his nature. He stood head and shoulders above other men and wore a "stove-pipe" hat which added nearly another foot to his height. The usual look on his face was sad, solemn, calm, but this he could quickly change into a smile. The proof of a man's good humor is that he can laugh at himself, and this Abe Lincoln could do. He was not a handsome

man, some even described Lincoln as ugly; others said that his face held a hidden beauty or light. In either case, Lincoln could joke about himself and told this story as a parallel to his own appearance: Once a woman on horseback met a man also riding a horse. The woman stopped, looked at the man and exclaimed, "Well, you're the homeliest man I ever saw!" To which the man replied that he could not help it. "No; I suppose not," the woman answered, "but, at least, you might stay at home."

Abraham Lincoln's years in the White House were probably the toughest any President has ever had to bear. The ever mounting casualty lists of both North and South weighed on Lincoln like a cross. But as humor is often very close to tragedy, so Abe Lincoln could find laughter in the midst of the war years. Once it was reported to him that a brigadier with a troop of cavalry had strayed into Confederate lines and was captured. "I can make a better brigadier any day," he remarked, "but those horses cost the government \$125 a head."

Almost daily, in the White House, Lincoln was confronted with mothers, wives, and sweethearts of soldiers condemned to be shot for some breach of military law. The women came pleading for pardon of their loved ones and usually he granted their requests. Lincoln's generals said his leniency was ruining the discipline of the Army, but his remarks on granting pardons show how he felt about taking the life of a man. Some of these were: "I don't see that shooting will do him any good." Of a soldier condemned for falling asleep on sentry duty, "I might have done the same thing, myself." And this message was wired to Colonel Mulligan, "If you haven't shot Barney D. yet, don't."

From his tasks in the White House, Lincoln took the time to read books of humor. He even read selections at his Cabinet meetings. It is said that the day after the bloody battle of Fredericksburg, a congressman entered Lincoln's office and was shocked to find him reading a humorous piece by Artemus Ward.

But the men close to Lincoln knew that his reading of humor and his story telling was "a safety-valve . . . a relief from oppressed cares." Usually, when Abe told a story, it was a parable on the situation at hand. Though he was criticized and called "the White House joker," it may have been the saving grace for the nation that Lincoln had a sense of humor. Had this not been a part of his personality, he might have cracked under the weight of his responsibility.

"HELP ME LET THIS DOG GO."

The terrible butchery at the battle of Fredericksburg, made Lincoln almost broken-hearted.

Governor Custer of Pennsylvania, expressed his regrets that his description had so sadly affected the President. He remarked: "I would give all I possess to know how to rescue you from this terrible war." Then Mr. Lincoln's wonderful recuperative powers asserted themselves and this marvelous man was himself.

Lincoln's aspect suddenly changed, and he relieved his mind by telling a story.

"This reminds me, Governor," he said, "of an old farmer out in Illinois that I used to know.

"He took it into his head to go into hog-raising. He sent out to Europe and imported the finest breed of hogs he could buy.

"The prize hog was put in a pen, and the farmer's two mischievous boys, James and John, were told to be sure not to let it out. But James, the worst of

the two, let the brute out the next day. The hog went straight for the boys, and drove John up a tree, then the hog went for the seat of James' trousers, and the only way the boy could save himself was by holding on to the hog's tail.

"The hog would not give up his hunt, nor the boy his hold! After they had made a good many circles around the tree, the boy's courage began to give out, and he shouted to his brother, 'I say, John, come down, quick, and help me let go this hog!'

"Now, Governor, that is exactly my case. I wish some one would come, and help me to let the hog go."

Allen M. W. R.

HOW YOUNG DANIEL WEBSTER
ESCAPES A FLOGGING, AS
RELATED BY LINCOLN

related by Mr. Lincoln
Mr. Lincoln, on one occasion, narrated to Hon. Mr. Odell and others, with much zest, the following story about young Daniel Webster:

When quite young, at school, Daniel was one day guilty of a gross violation of the rules. He was detected in the act, and called upon by the teacher for punishment. This was to be the old-fashioned "feruling" of the hand. His hands happened to be very dirty. Knowing, this, on the way to the teacher's desk, he spit upon the palm of his right hand, wiping it off upon the side of his pantaloons.

"Give men your hand, sir" said the teacher, very sternly.

Out went the right hand, partly cleansed. The teacher looked at it a moment, and said:

"Daniel, if you will find another hand in this schoolroom as filthy as that, I will let you off this time."

Instantly from behind the back came the left hand. "Here it is, sir," was the ready reply.

"That will do," said the teacher, "for this time; you can take your seat, sir."
